Green Horse Project

Scenic Quality Report

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For:

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Nez Perce - Clearwater National Forests

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Introduction

Visual analysis for the Green Horse project will focus on the effects of the proposed project activities on the scenic quality of the landscapes encompassed within the analysis area. The report will describe the existing landscape character of the area, will list the desired condition of the area from the 1987 Nez Perce National Forest Plan, determine which roads, trails and recreation areas may be affected by the project, and describe what impact the proposed activities would have on the landscape character of the area. These impacts will then be compared with the Nez Perce National Forest Plan standards to determine if the project meets those standards. Two additional documents will be prepared for this project that will supplement this report. The first is a unit by unit description of the proposed changes which will include the Visual Quality Objective (VQO) for each unit and any areas requiring special considerations. The second is an analysis of the impact of the proposed activities from various viewpoints found within and adjacent to the project areas using simulation capabilities found in the Google Earth (2020) program.

This project will analyze all proposed activities, but will focus on the various vegetative harvesting activities and prescribed burnings, as they generally represent the greatest change to the scenic condition of an area. For example, watershed improvement projects and road maintenance activities may have a short term impact on the scenery of an area, but generally do not impact the scenic quality of an area in the longer term. Scenic quality is not directly related to the purpose and need of this project, but this area is used by forest visitors and the landscapes found here are the backdrop of their recreation experiences. Changes to the scenery of this area would have an effect on the visitor's enjoyment of the area in the long and short term.

Relevant Laws, Regulations, and Policy

Regulatory Framework

Land and Resource Management Plan

Scenery: The Nez Perce National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) 1987 provides standards and guidelines for visual quality:

- All landscape-altering activities will meet adopted Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs). Duration of visual impacts should meet the guidelines outlined for each VQO in Agriculture Handbook No. 462-Chapter 2.
- Visually sensitive projects will be monitored on-site after the completion of the project to determine whether the project met adopted VQOs.

Roadless areas: This project contains two roadless areas that are part of the Idaho Roadless Rule, O'Hara – Falls Creek and West Meadow Creek. The O'Hara – Falls Creek Roadless area is located to the south and west of the project area and West Meadow Creek area is found to the east. The roadless areas have the Backcountry – Restoration Theme, which limits road building and some timber harvest activities. The Visual Quality Objective for all of the acreage found within the Idaho Roadless Rule areas in the Green Horse Project is *Modification*. From a

scenery standpoint activities that meet the Roadless Rule criteria and the VQOs would meet the objective of the area for scenic quality.

Federal Law

National Forest Management Act

The National Forest Management Act of 1976 included protections for the aesthetics of the National Forests. Harvest units will be located to achieve the desired combination of multiple-use objectives. The units cut will be shaped and blended with the natural terrain, to the extent practicable, to achieve visual (aesthetic), wildlife habitat, or other objectives.

Topics and Issues Addressed in This Analysis

Purpose and Need

Visual quality is not listed directly as a part of the purpose and need of the project, but improvements to the health and resiliency of the forest would improve the overall scenic condition of the area in the long term.

Issues

Meeting the Nez Perce National Forest Plan standards for visual quality.

Resource Indicators and Measures

Effects to the visual resource are discussed in general terms; however, the indicator used to measure effects is whether or not VQOs are achieved. Below is a brief description of each objective level from the Visual Management System.

- ***Preservation***: In general, human activities are not detectable to the visitor.
- ***Retention***: Human activities are not evident to the casual Forest visitor.
- ***Partial Retention***: Human activities may be evident, but must remain subordinate to the character of the landscape.
- ***Modification***: Human activities may dominate the characteristic of the landscape but must, at the same time, utilize naturally established form, line, color, and texture.
- ***Maximum Modification***: Human activity may dominate the characteristic landscape, but should appear as natural occurrences when viewed as background.

VQOs provide measurable standards for scenery management in conjunction with demands for goods and services from the forest. Visual resource management is integral to all management areas and implied in all management goals. The Forest Plan standard relevant to the project area for the Green Horse project are:

Table 1 - Resource indicators and measures for assessing effects.

Resource Element	Resource Indicator	Measure (Quantify if possible)	Used to address: P/N, or key issue?	Source (LRMP S/G; law or policy, BMPs, etc.)?
Visual Quality	Visual Quality Objectives (VQO)	Degree to which VQOs are met	Yes	LRMP

Methodology

The Nez Perce National Forest Plan 1987 requires use of the Visual Management System (1974) to analyze the visual quality of a project. Since the 1987 Land Management Plan was completed, the Visual Management System (VMS) has been replace by the Scenery Management System (1995). A crosswalk between the two systems is found in Agricultural Handbook 701, Appendix A. Visual quality objectives (VQOs) are based on the area seen from sensitive viewpoints such as travel corridors and recreation and administrative use areas where the forest background scenery is important to the enjoyment of the area. These visually sensitive viewsheds are illustrate in the 1987 Nez Perce National Forest Plan Visual Quality Objective map. A variety of tools are used in the visual resource analysis including analyzing VQO maps, field visits and visibility modeling.

Using ArcMap 10.3 (ESRI Inc., 1999-2009), GIS shapefiles of harvest units were overlaid on spatially rectified VQO maps displaying visual quality objectives across the area of interest. Original VOQ maps were prepared for the 1987 Nez Perce National Forest Plan using the process outlined in the Agriculture Handbook Number 462 (1976).

Treatment units and their associated VQOs were evaluated in relation to visually sensitive viewpoints identified in the Forest Plan to determine the extent to which proposed activities would likely be seen, and the likelihood that those activities would adversely affect VQOs. VQO maps prepared under the Forest Plan are very general in nature. Scenic class and sensitivity level can provide a general understanding; however, the maps can't always illustrate how visible specific treatments would be from locations of concern, or the extent to which treatments are likely to stand out or blend with existing scenic features.

Initial field reconnaissance was done to further assess the visibility of potential treatments in the context of the current landscape. Points on VQO maps with direct line of site to treatment units were identified. Units were observed from these locations, using unit maps. Proposed harvest activities are found in all viewing zones when viewed from key viewpoints. To assist in determining unit visibility, the analysis used Google Earth (Google Inc. 2020). Treatment units for each alternative were imported into Google Earth and draped over the landscape. Units were then viewed from ground level or "street view" at a variety of representative sensitive locations, including: American River – Selway Road 443, the Boundary Ridge Road 464, and the Boundary Trail 835. This 3-D modeling gives a different perspective on how visible a given area is from a specific geographic location. A limitation of using Google Earth for determining visibility is that near view screening from adjacent trees cannot be taken into consideration. For instance, if you

are on a trail or road, the 3-D imaging cannot place you down amongst the trees, where your view might be obscured by trees and other vegetation in the foreground. These areas were then field verified and digital photography is compared to the Google images to determine the final effect on the visual resource. After establishing relative sensitivity of affected areas when viewed from key viewpoints, Agricultural Handbooks 462 and 701 were used as references to determine if proposed activities met the Forest Plan Visual Quality Objectives.

Information Sources

Current photography, forest plan mapping, forest plan information and site visits provided most of the information for this analysis. References are listed at the end of the Visual Resources Report.

Incomplete and Unavailable Information

There is no incomplete or unavailable information.

Spatial and Temporal Context for Effects Analysis

The geographic scope of the scenery analysis for the Green Horse Project includes areas visible from key locations both within and outside the area of interest. Key visual points bounding the visual resource area include the roads, trails and recreational use areas within the analysis area. Figure 8 and Table 2 show the Visual Quality Objectives mapping for the project area and list viewing corridors and their sensitivity levels identified in the 1987 Nez Perce National Forest Plan which are relevant to the Green Horse visual quality analysis. Direct and indirect effects analysis focuses on the viewshed and viewpoints from which the proposed activities can be seen, and the extent proposed treatment units affect the visual quality objectives assigned to that piece of ground. The cumulative effects area evaluates the scenic effects on the area that is traditionally used by local and regional visitors recreating in this area. The temporal scope of the analysis is limited to the 25 to 30 years following harvest activities. This time period is the length of time openings created by regeneration harvest are likely to be evident given the growing conditions of the area.

Direct/Indirect Effects Boundaries

Spatial

The spatial boundaries for analyzing the direct and indirect effects to scenery include areas where visitors using the roads and trail are able to view into areas where management activities would occur. This would reflects the impacts on the scenery for visitors that would be utilizing facilities in or near to the project area. For the Green Horse Project area this would include just lands within the analysis area, as there are no critical viewpoints outside of the project area boundary.

Temporal

The temporal boundaries for analyzing the direct and indirect effects are 25 – 30 years from the time the activities occur. It generally would take that long for openings created by the management activities to no longer appear as man-made openings.

Cumulative Effects Boundaries

The spatial boundaries for analyzing the cumulative effects to visual resources include areas within and adjacent to the analysis area that may have recreation activities occurring that are similar to those found in the project area or that have destinations that are related to the project area. Access to this area is relatively limited therefore the cumulative effects would be limited to the project area and the area adjacent to the main access route, the American River – Selway Road 443 found to the south of the project area. There are trailheads and campsites found in this area that support visitors to the Greenhorse analysis area.

The temporal boundary for analyzing the cumulative effects is also 25 – 30 years. As in the indirect and directs effects, that is generally the time required for openings created by man-made activities to no longer appear as an opening. Examples can be found throughout the project area and within the cumulative effects area of past activities that have revegetated to the point where they no longer appear as openings within that 25 – 30 year time frame. The time does vary between different aspects and soil moisture regimes, but in general that is the time period required to attain a natural appearing landscape character.

Affected Environment

Existing Condition

The Green Horse analysis are is located approximately ten miles east of the community of Lowell, Idaho and ten miles north of Elk City, Idaho. With the existing road conditions, the area is accessed mostly from the Elk City area to the south. The analysis area is found within the Bitterroot Mountains in an area of rolling uplands. The Selway River is found to the north of the project area and the South Fork of the Clearwater is found to the south. Both of these river corridors are popular destinations for visitors pursuing a number of recreation opportunities, but access to the project area from these rivers is difficult and does not represent a significant portion

Figure 1 - View looking west toward the rolling uplands dividing the Selway and the South Fork of the Clearwater River. Past harvest from the 1980s and 1990s is evident in the foreground, middleground and background.

of constituents recreating in the Green Horse area.

Landforms and Rivers

The majority of the project area is within the rolling uplands to the south of the Selway River. There are some portions along the northern boundary that are transitioning to the breaklands of large tributaries of the Selway. These landscapes are commonly found in the area and do not have distinctive rocks outcrops, mountain peaks, or other distinctive landforms. There are no large rivers found in the project area, although some of the northern portions of the analysis area are part of the highly dissected landscapes adjacent to the Selway River. Creeks found in the project area are smaller, with few distinctive river features.

Vegetation

The Greenhorse project area is vegetated with mostly with mixed conifer species including grand fir, Douglas fir, lodgepole pine, western larch and western red cedar. There are some isolated areas of deciduous vegetation which are generally found in riparian areas. There are some areas of shrubs and grasses, but these do not represent a significant portion of the vegetation. For the most part the landscape is covered with the continuous canopy of coniferous vegetation. These vegetative patterns are commonly found in the upland areas adjacent to the Selway River and have few distinctive vegetative features.

Evidence of insect and disease is common throughout the area, with individual trees and groups of tree that are currently dead or dying. Evidence of fire's effect across the landscape is also common in the vegetation in the project area. Most of the fire effects are seen in the northern portion of the analysis area where the Wash Fire occurred in 2015.

Figure 2 - Stand conditions vary, but much of the area exhibits some level of insect and disease activity.

Figure 3 - Looking south from the American River - Selway Road 443 toward the Selway River Canyon. Dead and dying vegetation is commonly found in this area.

Constituents

Recreation users visiting the Greenhorse project area participate mostly in dispersed camping pursuits, including dispersed camping trail use, berry-picking, equestrian use, motorized and non-motorized trail use, hunting, and driving for pleasure. Recreation use in this area is considered to be low, with most activities occurring in the fall hunting season. Most travel to the area is on the arterial roads leading into the project area, with some minor trail use.

Figure 4 - Limber Luke campsite adjacent to the American River - Selway Road 443 is found just to the south of the project area. There are no developed recreation facilities in the project area.

The Greenhorse project area forms the scenic backdrop of the recreational visitor's activities and the scenic quality from the roads has an impact on enjoyment of the area. The Boundary Ridge Road 464 and the American River – Selway Road 443 are access routes that are popular for recreation visitor use and are considered to have a high (Concern Level 1) to moderate concern for scenery (Concern Level 2). The Boundary Trail 835 is found to the south of the project area and access a trailhead on the American River – Selway Road. Some users of the project area camp at the Limber Luke campsite and recreate in the project area. Other roads and trails in the area have some use but are not considered sensitive travel corridors. All roads and trails having either high or moderate concern for scenery within the project area are listed in Table 1. Other roads and trails in the area have some use but are not considered sensitive travel corridors.

Wild and Scenic Rivers

The Selway River is a designated Wild and Scenic River and the South Fork of the Clearwater River is an eligible Wild and Scenic River identified in the Nez Perce National Forest Plan. Scenery is considered an Outstanding and Remarkable Value for both rivers so the viewshed of the South Fork of the Clearwater and Selway will be reviewed considering views from the river but initial reviews indicate that the project area would not be visible from either of these river corridors.

Management Areas 12 and 17

Small areas of Management Area 17 are found in the southern portion of the analysis area adjacent to the American River – Selway Road 443 and north in some of the northern drainages within the middleground viewshed of the Selway Wild and Scenic River. The standards for this management area are visual quality objectives of *Retention* or *Partial Retention*. The VQOs for this management area would recognize Sensitivity Level 1 and 2 viewpoints and travel routes. Portions of the analysis area are also with Management Area 12 where the Forest Plan standard is that the Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs) are *Modification* or *Maximum Modification*. The VQOs for this management area would recognize Sensitivity Level 2 and 3 viewpoints and travel routes.

Roadless Areas

The project area is surrounded by roadless areas including the O'Hara – Falls Creek area to the north and west, the Lick Point area to the south, and the West Meadow Creek Roadless Area to the south and east. Further to the east the Selway Bitterroot Wilderness Area stretches from the edge of the West Meadow Creek Roadless area to the Montana border.

Past Activities

Timber harvest, prescribed fire and wildfire activities tend to have the greatest effect on the scenic conditions of the landscape in the Selway River area. Both wildfire and timber harvest have occurred within the project area.

Wildfire:

Extensive portions of the Selway River corridor have been affected by wildfire in the last 10 years. The Johnson Bar fire of 2014 burned to the west of the project area, severely affecting the landscape from Goddard Creek to the Middle Fork of the Clearwater River. In 2015 the Wash

Fire burned much of the area to the north of the project area, affected the headwaters of some drainages which are within the project area. The Falls Fire in 2017 re-burned a small portion of the landscape found within the perimeter of the Wash Fire.

Harvest:

There is a history of timber harvest within the project area that stretches back into the mid-1970s, with the greatest number of acres of harvest occurring in the 1980s and 1990s. The 75 Stillman Cedar Salvage occurred in 1975 and since the harvest method was salvage harvest, the area no longer appears as an opening. Harvest occurring in the 1980s included 1980 - 1984 Fall Creek (CCR, SW), 1981-84 Horse Creek (CCR), 1982 – 83 Stillman Cedar (Salv, CCR, SW), 1984 Falls Point (CCR, SW), FP Salvage (SW), 1988 Saddle Stillman (CCR, SW), and 1989 – 1990 Upper Falls Creek (CCR). The 1980s represented the decade with the greatest amount of harvest for this area. While most of the regeneration harvest units still appear as openings in the middle and background view due to color and texture differences, they do not appear as openings in the foreground viewshed. Most of the plantations have trees between 10 and 15 feet tall depending on slope and aspect of the harvest area. Harvest occurring in the 1990s included 1991 - 94 Burnt Backbone (CCR, ST), 1992 – 97 Sob Island (CCR), 1993 Upper Falls Creek (CCR), and 1997 Sob Salvage (Salv). As with the harvest from the 1980s, intermediate harvest does not appear as openings, but regeneration harvest does appear as openings in the middle and background views. Finally, in 2003, 2015, and 2019 there were some roadside salvage and fuel break harvest projects, but for all of the visually apparent openings, the size and shape of the harvest areas appear as natural openings in the background viewshed and therefore meet the Visual Quality Objectives of *Modification* and *Maximum Modification*. There are a number of natural and man-made openings intermingled in the project area, but there are currently no areas within the boundary of the project that do not meet the Forest Plan standards for visual quality.

Figure 5 - Past harvest area along American River - Selway Road does not appear as an opening in the foreground, but does appear as one in the middle and background views due to color and texture difference. (Clearcut harvest from Horse Creek Sale 1981.)

Figure 6 - Harvest areas can been seen in the middle and background views, but in foreground views do not appear as a distinct openings.

The project area is surrounded by roadless areas where there has not been past harvest so there would be not cumulative impacts from adjacent harvesting within those areas.

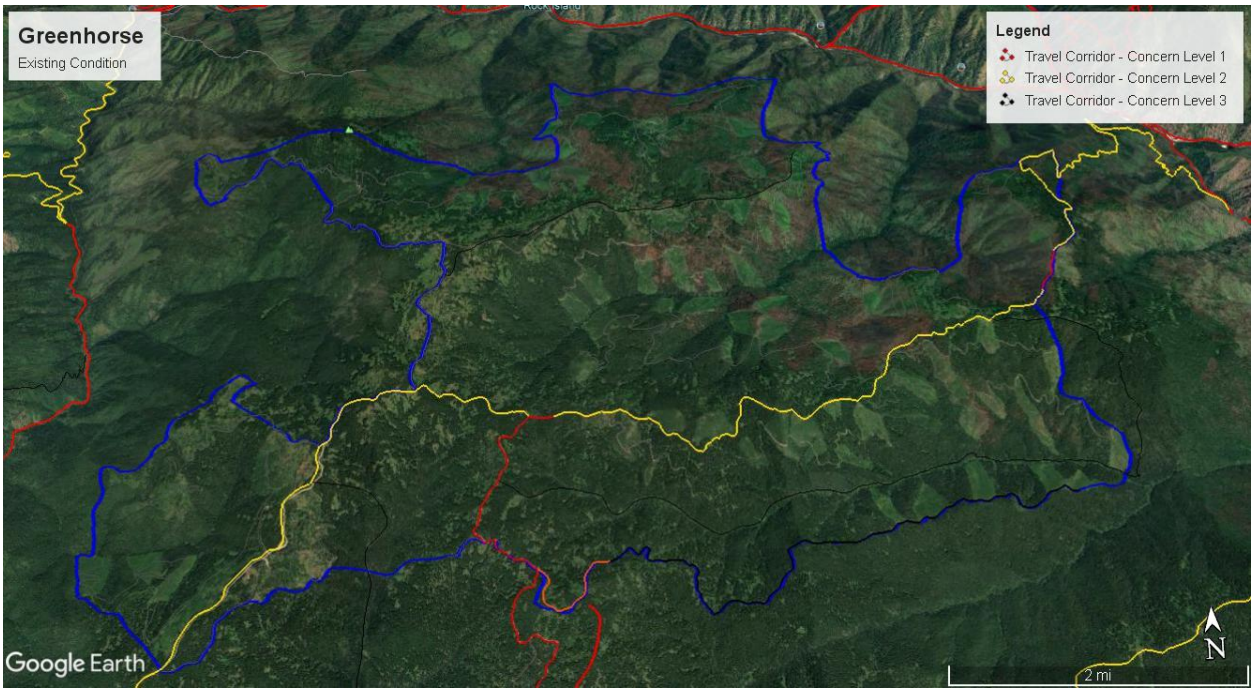

Figure 7 - This Google Earth image shows past harvest activities, existing travel corridors (High concern for scenery - red, moderate - yellow and all others - low). Most of the visible openings were created in the 1980s and 1990s and have young plantations that do not appear as openings in the foreground but can be seen in the middle and background views.

While some openings within the analysis area are still evident, they do not tend to dominate the existing landscape character in the project area. These openings meet the VQO for the area of *Partial Retention, Modification* and *Maximum Modification*. Visible openings are in various stages of regeneration, but most would take at least 10 to 15 years to appear as only natural timber stands without man-made openings.

Desired Condition

The desired condition for scenic quality within the area of interest is to retain the existing landscape character and maintain the designated visual quality objectives of *Partial Retention, Modification* and *Maximum Modification* from travel corridors and use areas found within or adjacent to the project area. There are dispersed camping areas within the Green Horse analysis area, but no developed recreation sites. The American River – Selway Road 443, found to the east of the American River, forms a portion of the southern boundary of the Green Horse project area and then bisects the project area from west to east. It is the most common access point for recreation access to the area and has a high concern for scenery to the point where it intersects with the Boundary Ridge Road 464. At that point the concern level for scenery drops to moderate. The Boundary Ridge Road 464 also has a moderate concern for scenery. The Boundary Trail 835 is found to the east of the American River – Selway Road 443 and has a high

concern for scenery. All other roads and trails found in the project area have a low concern for scenery. A list of critical roads and trails is found in Table 1.

Table 2 - List of key viewpoints, their sensitivity level and visual quality objectives found within the Green Horse project area. Viewpoints or viewing corridors are derived from the 1987 Nez Perce National Forest Plan Visual Quality Objective Map.

Viewpoint or Viewing Corridor	Sensitivity Level	Foreground 0 – ¼ mi.	Middleground ¼ mi. – 3 mi.	Background 3 mi. – 5+ mi.
American River – Selway Road 443	1 and 2	Partial Retention / Modification	Modification	Maximum Modification
Boundary Trail 835	1	Partial Retention	Modification	Maximum Modification
Boundary Ridge Road 464	2	Modification	Modification	Maximum Modification

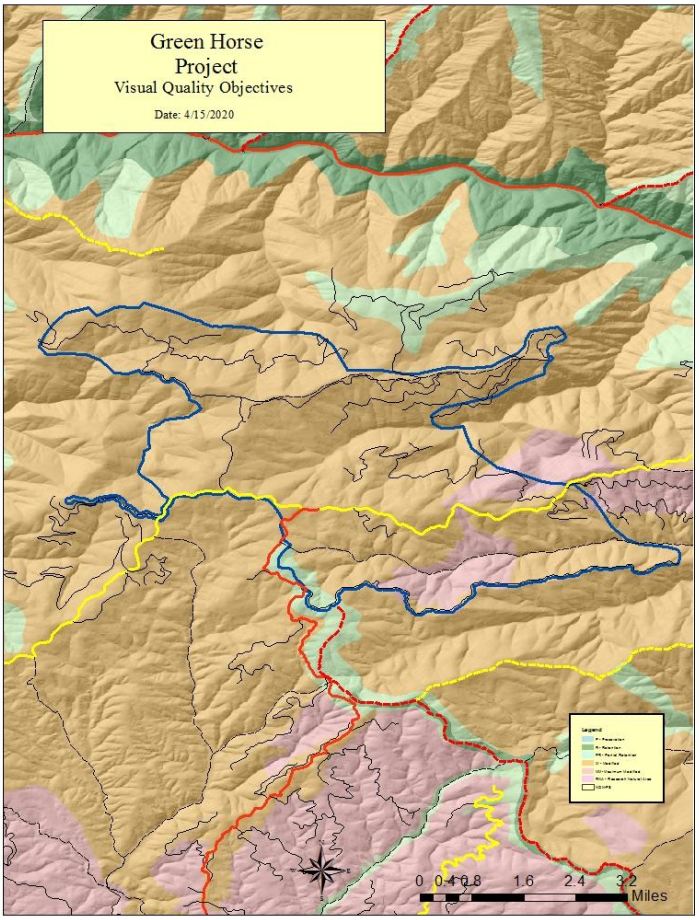

Figure 8 - Visual Quality Objectives Map - 1987 Nez Perce National Forest Land Management Plan. The project area includes the VQOs of *Partial Retention* (Light Green), *Modification* (Tan), and *Maximum Modification* (Pink).

Resource Indicator and Measure 1

Compliance with the Nez Perce National Forest Plan standards for visual quality is determined by the level at which the area currently meets the Visual Quality Objectives listed in the Forest Plan. For the Green Horse project area, the existing man-made openings meet the Forest Plan Visual Quality Objective standards. There are some areas that have man-made activities that are obvious, especially in the middle and background viewsheds, but these areas do meet the VQO standard of *Modification* and *Maximum Modification* designated for that area.

Table 3 - Resource indicators and measures for the existing condition

Resource Element	Resource Indicator (Quantify if possible)	Measure (Quantify if possible)	Existing Condition
Visual Quality	Meets Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs)	Percentage of acres that meet VQOs	100

Environmental Consequences

Alternative 1 – No Action

Direct and Indirect Effects

With no harvest activity planned to occur under alternative 1, (no action) there would be no direct long or short-term effects to the scenic condition of the project area. The existing openings, within and adjacent to the project area, which are visible as a result of past forest management would continue to recover tree growth and over time would revegetate. Most of the existing man-made openings in the project area would remain visible for another 10 to 15 years before they no longer appear as openings in the middle and background viewsheds.

Processes affecting forest dynamics would continue, including continuing changes related to insect and disease activities evident in the area. Dead and dying trees, which currently appear as individual and groups of dead trees scattered across the landscape, would be visible throughout the area. These dead and dying trees are especially evident along the roadways including the American River – Selway Road 443 and the Boundary Ridge Road 464. This may increase future risk of wildfire as the amount of dead and dying vegetation increases. While for some, this may have a negative impact on the scenic quality of the area, these dynamic processes are considered natural, and the resource area would continue to meet designated VQOs.

Cumulative Effects - Alternative 1

Under the no action alternative past harvest activities, which occurred mostly in the 1980s and 1990s, would still visible in the middle and background views from roadways with moderate to low concern for scenery within the project area. Past harvest areas that are immediately adjacent to major travelways in the project area have plantations that have reached 10 – 15 feet in height, which effectively screen views of the surrounding landscapes from roadways that bisect the

project area. Past harvest within the project area does not dominate the overall landscape character of the area and therefore meets the Visual Quality Objectives of *Modification* and *Maximum Modification* designated for those areas. With no additional modifications proposed in the no action alternative, past harvest would continue to revegetate and would move toward a more natural appearance.

There are currently no active projects within or adjacent to the analysis area where harvest is visible from the analysis area. There are some harvest projects found to the east of the Green Horse area, but they are outside the cumulative effects area of the project.

In the foreseeable future, the Limber Elk project is proposed to the south of the Green Horse area that has harvest proposed adjacent to the American River – Selway Road 443. This harvest would be visible to visitors accessing the Green Horse area from the south. This harvest will be designed to meet the VQOs designated along the American River – Selway Road 443.

Wildfire has also impacted much of the northern portion of the analysis area. These changes are considered a natural event and for scenic quality would therefore meet the Visual Quality Objectives of *Partial Retention, Modification and Maximum Modification* designated for the analysis area.

Resource Indicator and Measure 1 – Alternative 1 - No Action

The no action alternative would meet the Forest Plan Visual Quality Objectives of *Partial Retention, Modification* and *Maximum Modification*. Vegetation in past harvest areas within the project area would continue to grow and would eventually no longer appear as openings. Within areas where wildfire created large areas of dead and dying vegetation, those trees would continue to die and fall creating new openings. Table 4. Resource indicators and measures for no action alternative direct/indirect effects.

Table 4 - Resource indicators and measures for Alternative 1 - No Action

Resource Element	Resource Indicator (Quantify if possible)	Measure (Quantify if possible)	(Alternative 1)
Visual Quality	Meets Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs)	Percentage of acres that meet VQOs	100

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Effects

Transportation System –

Road reconditioning and reconstruction– Road reconditioning would occur on approximately 20 miles of roads within the project area. These activities would include typical road maintenance activities such as brushing, blading, ditch cleaning, repairs, and aggregate placement where needed. These road improvements include changes that would reduce the impacts of roads on streams and reduce erosion. This would improve the scenic quality of the area in the long term.

Road reconstruction would occur on approximately 19 miles of system roads. Activities would include addition of drainage, surfacing where needed, realignment where needed and installation of road structures such as signs and gates where needed. Again, this would improve the long term scenic character of the area be creating more stable road prisms and reduce unsightly road conditions. This would not change the landscape character of the area and would improve watershed conditions.

Temporary road construction - Approximately 2 miles of temporary roads would be necessary to provide access to all harvest units. These roads would not be open for public use and would be obliterated after management activities were complete. In the short term (less than 5 years) these roads would be visible on the landscape as a part of the overall harvest opening and would need to meet the required VQO for the area (see discussion of harvest units below). In the long term (greater than 5 year), since these roads are planned for obliteration, they would revegetate in the same manner as the harvest units and would therefore meet the same VQO as the harvest unit.

Site Preparation and Reforestation –

All proposed harvest areas (approximately 1,513 acres) would have some type of site preparation to treat activity generated fuels and prepare for reforestation after harvest. Reforestation and animal damage control would be designed to restore early seral species such as ponderosa pine, western larch, Douglas fir, and lodgepole pine. These activities speed the regrowth of vegetation in harvest areas and would improve the scenic character of the area in both the short term (up to 5 years) and long term (10 – 15 years when reforested areas have visible coniferous vegetation).

Prescribed Burning -

Prescribed burning is proposed across the approximately 570 acres found in Unit 27. This burning would be designed to maintain natural openings, reduce surface and ladder fuels, and provide fuel breaks along public access roadways to improve safety in the long term. It is anticipated that the prescribed burning would create a mosaic of burned and unburned coniferous vegetation, similar to the effects of a natural wildfire. There may be some evidence of harvest activities since some areas may be thinned prior to ignition, but the effects would be minor and would meet the VQO of *Modification* designated for the areas proposed for prescribed burning. Many of these areas already have an open character, so long term changes would be minimal.

Figure 9 - View from the Stillman Point Road in area where prescribed burning is proposed.

Timber Harvest -

Intermediate Harvest

Intermediate harvest is proposed across approximately 180 acres in areas immediately adjacent to the Stillman Point Road 356, the Boundary Ridge Road 464, the Saddle Ridge Road 2103 in the western portion of the analysis area, and along the Off Center Road 2116 in the southeastern portion of the analysis area. This proposed intermediate harvest (Units 01, 02, 09, 17, 22, 23, 24, 25 and 26) would occur in areas that are within the boundaries of O'Hara Falls Creek and West Meadow Creek Roadless Areas. The salvage harvest would remove dead and dying coniferous vegetation that are within falling and striking distance of improvements and/or the road (approximately 150 feet). Activity fuels burning or mastication may be used to treat areas to remove excess fuels. Percentage of removal would vary, depending on the health of the activity area. This would create a variable retention of stand structure that would emulate natural vegetation patterns, similar to the existing vegetative patterns along some areas of the Stillman Point Road 356. Anticipated tree retention would create a feathered edge along the boundary of the harvest area and when complete the proposed harvest areas would meet the VQOs of *Modification* and *Maximum Modification* designated for those areas. This harvest activity would not dominate the landscape character in the area and would appear as a natural opening in the background viewshed.

Regeneration Harvest

Regeneration treatments would remove disease-susceptible species and existing dead and dying vegetation. Regeneration harvest would occur over approximately 1,513 acres, with stand structure retention within riparian areas, landslide prone areas, areas needed to meet wildlife

requirements, and areas where harvest system limitations prevent treatment. It is anticipated that these retention areas would create openings that would emulate natural openings created by wildfire or insect and disease outbreaks. Stand structure would be retained where possible within and adjacent to established dispersed sites that receive low to moderate use. When the proposed harvest is adjacent to roadways where safe ingress and egress is needed (outside of Idaho Roadless Area), harvest would occur approximately 150 feet out from the roadway to create a fuel break to improve public and fire fighter safety.

American River – Selway Road 443

The American River – Selway Road 443 provides visitor access to the project area mostly from the south since the roadway access north into the Selway River drainage has been damaged over time due to multiple fire events. Visitors using this travelway have a high to moderate concern for scenery. Harvest units are found on either side of the roadway and include both fuel break units and larger regeneration harvest units. Units 17 A and B are located at the intersection of the American River – Selway Road and the Boundary Ridge Road 464. They areas are adjacent to each other and would be seen as one opening when harvest is complete. Although this opening would be large it would have a very complex shape ranging from fuel break only to much larger opening areas. When completed these units would have the appearance of a natural opening after harvest. Further to the west, unit 20 is found to the north of the roadway. Most of this large unit is found in the steep breaklands of Falls Creek and would be screened by vegetation and topography from the roadway. Units 18 and 19 are located further north of the roadway and would also be screened from view of Road 443. Past harvest adjacent to the proposed openings has revegetated to the point that the trees area 10 – 15 feet high and provide visual screening of the adjacent harvest. Portions of these units are also adjacent to dead and dying vegetation from the Wash Fire, which would eventually appear as an opening. The final unit on this roadway in unit 21. Most of this large unit is also found in the steep breaklands of Falls Creek and would be mostly screened from view of the roadway. The eastern section of this unit is composed of roadside fuel break on either side of the road. Throughout this area on both sides of the roadway there are large natural openings in the existing vegetation that would create a feathered edge along the boundaries of the units.

Although the units in this area are large, they have very complex shapes and are bordered by natural openings and areas impacted by wildfire that would eventually appear as openings. While the appearance of the vegetation would change, foreground screening vegetation and the topography of the area would limit some views of the openings. Given the nature of the existing vegetation and the openings created by wildfire activities these units would appear similar to the natural openings when viewed in the background and therefore would meet the VQOs of *Modification* and *Maximum Modification*.

Off Center Road 2116

Harvest adjacent to the Off Center Road 2116 is generally limited to harvesting fuel breaks areas on either side of the roadway. To the north of the road regeneration harvest would remove vegetation for approximately 150 feet in units 22, 25, and 26. This would blend with existing natural openings, creating a feathered edge along the boundaries of the unit. To the south of the

roadway, harvest within the West Meadow Roadless Area would be limited to hazard tree removal. Units 23 and 24 would have wider openings to the north of the roadway, creating moderate size openings across the steep breaklands south of Horse Creek. These openings have complex shapes, leaving large areas of stand structure in the riparian corridors. The natural openings in the existing vegetation would provide feathering, the size of these proposed harvest areas would be in keeping with natural openings found in the area, and the complex shape of these units would create harvest areas that meet the VQOs of *Modification* and *Maximum Modification*.

Boundary Ridge Road 464 and O'Hara Lookout Road 464A

Similar to the Off Center Road harvest, the Boundary Ridge Road and O'Hara Lookout Road harvest would focus on mostly on creating roadside fuel breaks. All harvest falls within Unit 17B, which stretches across the length of both of these roadways. For the O'Hara Lookout Road, regeneration harvest is proposed south of the roadway and intermediate harvest is proposed north of the roadway where it is adjacent to the O'Hara – Falls Creek Roadless Area. The Boundary Ridge Road bisects the remainder of unit 17 B, with very large harvest openings proposed for the landscape found north of the roadway. This area is relatively steep breaklands in the headwaters of Falls Creek. The existing vegetation has a number of large natural openings intermingled with areas of continuous coniferous vegetation. The proposed harvest would have a very complex shape, including large riparian areas intermingled with existing open grassland areas.

As with the proposed harvest of unit 17 A along the American River – Selway road, harvest area would be large, they would have very complex shapes and are bordered by natural openings. While the appearance of the vegetation would change, the topography of the area would limit some views of the openings and the natural open areas would feather the edges of the harvest. Given the nature of the existing vegetation and the topography of the area, these units would appear similar to the natural openings and would be screened by topography from the roadway. When viewed in the background this area would meet the VQO of *Modification*.

Stillman Point Road 356

Roadside fuel break harvest proposed for this area falls within Unit 17B, which stretches across the entire length of the roadway. To the west of the roadway, hazard tree removal is proposed for areas within the O'Hara – Falls Creek Roadless Area. On the east side of the roadway regeneration harvest is proposed. Existing vegetation across this dry ridgeline is somewhat sporadic with large openings intermingled with patches of coniferous vegetation. This area is also proposed for the prescribed fire activity (Unit 27) and when harvest and prescribed fire activities are complete the area would appear more open, but would retain coniferous vegetation that is not consumed in the prescribed fire. Unit 16 is proposed to the east of the Stillman Point Road in the breaklands to the north of Falls Creek. This moderate sized unit would appear similar to other openings in the area when view in the background. When harvest is complete along this roadway it would appear more open, but proposed activities would not change the overall character of the landscape, which is currently relatively open. Unit 16 would be screened by topography from Road 356, since it is located in the relatively steep breakland area. When

viewed in the background this area would appear natural and would meet the VQOs of *Modification*.

Falls Creek II Road 9716

Roadside fuel break (regeneration) harvest is proposed for this area including units 10A, 10C, 12, 13, 14 and 15. These fuel break units stretch across much of the length of the roadway. Existing vegetation across this dry ridgeline is similar to the Stillman Road areas, with somewhat sporadic vegetation intermingled with large openings. This area is also proposed for small patches of prescribed fire activity (Unit 27) intermingled with harvest area. Units 10B and 11 are proposed to the southeast of the Falls Creek II Road in the breaklands to the northwest of Falls Creek. These moderate sized units would be partially screened by topography from the roadway, which has a low concern for scenery. When harvest is complete the landscape adjacent to the roadway would appear more open, but proposed activities would not change the character of the landscape, which is currently relatively open. Units 10B and 11 would appear as openings but would be screened in the foreground by topography from Road 9716 as they are located in the relatively steep breakland area. When viewed in the background, openings in this area would appear natural and would meet the VQOs of *Modification*.

Stillman Point Road 356 and Saddle Ridge Road 2103

Roadside fuel break harvest is proposed for this section of the Stillman Point Road and for a significant portion of the Saddle Ridge Road. Fuel break units found along these two routes include 01, 02, 03, and 09. Two other minor roadways are found east of the Saddle Ridge Road, the Stillman-Cedar Spur 9713 and the Island Creek Road 9715. Units 4 – 8 are located on these two minor roadways. For units 01, 02, 03 and 09, the southwest portion of the unit is within the O'Hara – Falls Creek Roadless area and would have hazard tree harvest only. The northeastern portions of these units and all of units 4 – 8 are proposed for regeneration harvest. North of the Stillman Point road it is also proposed to have prescribed (Unit 27) intermingled with harvest area. Units 02 and 03 also have larger areas of regeneration north of the roadway that would appear as an opening when harvest is complete. These moderate sized units would be visible in the foreground from the roadway, which has a low concern for scenery. When harvest is complete along this roadway it would appear more open, but proposed activities would not change the character of the landscape, which is currently relatively open. Units 02 and 03 would appear as moderate sized openings, but when viewed in the background this area would appear as a natural opening and would meet the VQO of *Modification*.

Management Area 12 and 17

The majority of the proposed regeneration harvest units are within Management Area 12. While some harvest units are relatively large, they have been designed to follow topographic features and would often have feathered edges due to the open nature of the existing vegetation. Give the complex shapes of the openings created by these harvest units, these man-made openings would appear similar to natural openings in the background viewshed and would therefore meet the VQOs of *Modification* and *Maximum Modification* designated for MA 12.

Portions of three units, 14, 15, and 17B, are found within Management Area 17. For the most part, these units are designed to create fuel breaks on either side of the roadways. For the portion of unit 17B in the northern section of MA 17, harvest would be broader reaching down into the headwaters of Horse Creek. The appearance of the vegetation would be modified in harvest areas, but harvest areas would have feathered edges due to the open nature of the landscape and the effects of past fires for units 14 and 15. The change in appearance caused by timber harvest would not dominate the landscape character and therefore the proposed harvest would meet the VQO of *Partial Retention* for this portion of MA 17.

Summary

The Green Horse project area is a relatively isolated area in the rolling uplands south of the Selway River. The project area is not visible from the Selway River corridor, so scenic views of the area are limited to the viewsheds of roads and trails within the project area. The southern portion of the American River – Selway Road 443 and the Boundary Trail 814 have a high concern for scenery, while the remainder of the American River – Selway Road 443, the Boundary Ridge Road 464 have a moderate concern for scenery. The remainder of the roads within the project area have low concern for scenery. There are dispersed camping areas within the project area, but no developed recreation facilities. The existing vegetation along the ridgelines of the project area where roadways are located is relatively open with significant natural openings intermingled with mature coniferous vegetation. Both the hazard tree removal and regeneration harvest fuel breaks along roadways in the project area would be obvious in the foreground but would not dominate the landscape character of the project area.

Larger regeneration harvest units would also be visible along roadways that have moderate to low concern for scenery. These units have been designed to follow the topography of the landscape, would have stand structure retention in riparian areas, and would have a relatively feathered edge due to the mix of natural openings present in most of the area. Prescribed burning would leave some areas of vegetative mortality, but it would have the same appearance as that of natural wildfire found throughout the northern portion of the project area. The proposed action would retain stand structure, create openings that appear natural in the background viewshed, and replanting would include vegetative species that are healthier and more resilient to insect and disease issues. As proposed, the fuel break and regeneration harvest, prescribed burning, and transportation system modifications would meet the Forest Plan Visual Quality Objectives of *Partial Retention*, *Modification* and *Maximum Modification*.

Management Areas 17: For those units within Management Area 17, proposed harvest would meet the VQO of *Partial Retention*. While the project area would appear different than it currently does, the harvest would be designed to emulate natural openings and would not dominate the existing landscape character in the foreground viewshed.

Idaho Roadless Areas:

The O'Hara-Falls Creek and West Meadow Creek Idaho Roadless Rule areas found within the project boundary have proposed management activities and are designated as Backcountry Restoration, which allows management activities under some circumstances. Vegetation would

be removed using intermediate timber harvest adjacent to existing roadways within the O'Hara - Falls Creek IRA along several roadways to remove dead and dying trees that pose a hazard t the road, including the O'Hara Point South Road 9711, Boundary Ridge Road 464, the Saddle Ridge Road 2103, and the Stillman Point Road 356. Along portions of the Stillman Point Road 356, prescribed fire is also proposed to the west of the existing roadway. Within the West Meadow Creek IRA, hazard tree removal developed through intermediate timber harvest would occur adjacent to the Off Center Road 2116. The natural character along these roadways varies from open landscapes with groups of trees intermingled with small areas of coniferous to areas where the coniferous vegetation is continuous. Many of the areas where the continuous vegetation occurs also show large areas affected by insect and disease activity or past wildfire events.

Proposed fuel break harvest and prescribed burning would improve safety along the roadways without changing the overall character of the landscape. There are many areas within the roadless area, especially along the ridgetops which currently have a relatively open character with a mixture of deciduous and coniferous vegetation. When complete, the proposed hazard tree removal areas would appear similar to those natural areas of mixed vegetation. Given the type of harvest and the open nature of the location of many of these activities, the harvest would meet the VQOs of *Modification* and *Maximum Modification* found in these roadless areas.

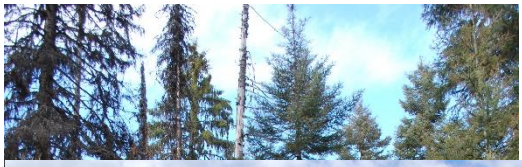

Figure 10 - Area adjacent to the Stillman Point Road showing insect and disease activity adjacent to the roadway.

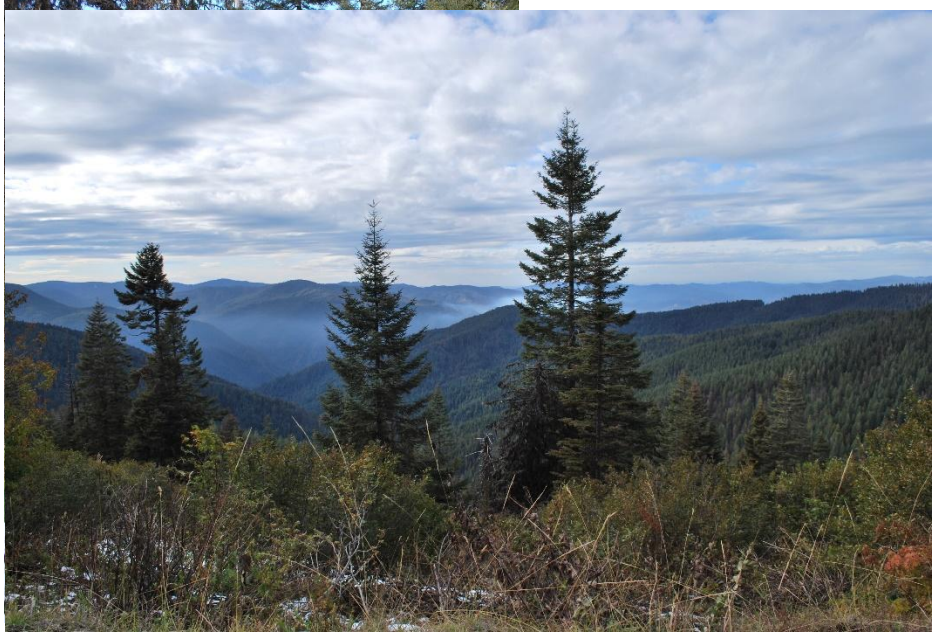

Figure 11 - This area adjacent to the Stillman Point Road is proposed for prescribed burning and currently is relatively open with occasional groups of coniferous trees. This example of mixed coniferous and deciduous vegetation would be similar to the appearance of the area after the fuel break harvest.

Cumulative Effects – Alternative 2

Past, Present, and Reasonably Foreseeable Activities Relevant to Cumulative Effects Analysis

Past –

Wildfires - Wildfires have occurred extensively in the northern portion of the project area. The Wash fires of 2015 had the greatest impact, burning across much of the canyon breaklands of the Selway River. There are still a number of dead and dying tree left standing after that fire, but eventually those trees would fall, creating a number of new openings and feathering the edges of existing openings. Smaller wildfire have also occurred in rolling uplands creating some openings but having a minimal effect.

Other management activities such as recreation management, trail management, road improvements, and invasive weed treatment occur across the analysis area. The effects of these activities to the scenic quality of the area are minimal. Some activities such as invasive weed treatment and watershed improvements, actually have a beneficial effect in the long term to the scenic quality of the analysis area.

Timber Harvest - There is evidence of extensive past harvest activities within the analysis area, including a number of openings that were created in the 1980s and 1990s. Most of these areas in the central portion of the analysis area have revegetated to the point they are no longer perceived as openings in the foreground but do appear as openings in the middle and background views as they generally appear as different color and texture from the adjacent forest vegetation. (See existing condition discussion for detailed discussion of past timber harvest.)

Present –

There are no timber sales within or adjacent to the project area that are ongoing. There are currently some activities occurring to the west of the project area, but they are outside of the viewshed of critical roads and trails within the Green Horse Project.

Reasonably Foreseeable Actions –

Currently there is project planning occurring in the Limber Luke and Elk Creek areas (foreseeable Limber Elk project) to the south of the Green Horse analysis area. This project is designed to analyze timber harvest activities within those drainages. It is anticipated that that analysis would result in timber harvest activities. These activities would be designed to meet the VQOs for that area and to also meet the overall goal for scenic quality in the cumulative effects boundary for this project and neighboring project areas.

Proposed Action

Under the Proposed Action past harvest activities which occurred mostly in the 1980s and 1990s would still visible in the middle and background views from roadways with moderate to low concern for scenery within the project area. Past harvest areas that are immediately adjacent to major travelways in the project area have plantations that have reached 10 – 15 feet in height, which effectively screen views of the surrounding landscapes from those roadways that bisect

the project area. Past harvest within the project area does not dominate the overall landscape character of the area.

Wildfire has also impacted much of the northern portion of the analysis area. These changes are considered a natural event and for scenic quality would therefore meet the Visual Quality Objectives of *Partial Retention, Modification and Maximum Modification*.

Proposed fuel break and regeneration harvest, prescribed burning and transportation system modification would be found throughout the project area. Both the hazard tree removal and regeneration harvest fuel breaks along roadways in the project area would be obvious in the foreground but would not dominate the landscape character of the project area. Larger regeneration harvest units would also be visible along roadways that have moderate to low concern for scenery. These units have been designed to follow the topography of the landscape, would have stand structure retention in riparian areas, and would have a relatively feathered edge due to the mix of natural openings present in most of the area. Prescribed burning would leave some areas of vegetative mortality, but it would have the same appearance as that of natural fire found throughout the northern portion of the project area. The proposed action would retain stand structure, create openings that appear natural in the background viewshed, and replanting would introduce vegetative species that are healthier and more resilient to insect and disease issues.

As proposed, the fuel break and regeneration harvest, prescribed burning, and transportation system modifications would meet the Forest Plan Visual Quality Objectives of *Partial Retention*, *Modification* and *Maximum Modification*. For those units within Management Area 17, proposed harvest would meet the VQO of *Partial Retention*. While the project area would appear different than it currently does, the harvest would be designed to emulate natural processes in the background viewshed area.

Resource Indicator and Measure 1 – Alternative 2

As proposed, the fuel break and regeneration harvest, prescribed burning, and transportation system modifications would meet the Forest Plan Visual Quality Objectives of Partial Retention, Modification and Maximum Modification. For those units within Management Area 17, proposed harvest would meet the VQO of Partial Retention. While the project area would appear different than it currently does, the harvest would be designed to emulate natural processes in the background viewshed area.

Table 5 - Resource indicator for measuring direct/indirect effects of Alternative 2 - Proposed Action.

Resource Element	Resource Indicator (Quantify if possible)	Measure (Quantify if possible)	Alternative 2 Direct/Indirect Effects
Visual Quality	Meets Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs)	Percentage of acres that meet VQOs	100

Monitoring

Once the project has been implemented it would be reviewed in the field by the Landscape Architect to determine how well it meets the forest plan visual quality objectives. This review would then be documented in the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests Monitoring Report.

Table 6 - Summary comparison of environmental effects to visual resources

Resource Element	Indicator/Measure	No Action	Proposed Action
Visual Quality	Meet Visual Quality Objectives	Under the no action alternative past harvest activities which occurred mostly in the 1980s and 1990s, would still be visible in the middle and background views from roadways with moderate to low concern for scenery. Past harvest areas that are immediately adjacent to major travelways in the project area have plantations that have reached 10 – 15 feet in height, which effectively screens views of the surrounding landscapes from those roadways. Past harvest within the project area does not dominate the overall landscape character of the area and therefore meets the Visual Quality Objectives of *Modification* and *Maximum Modification*. With no additional modifications proposed in the no action alternative, past harvest would continue to revegetate and would move toward a more natural appearance. Wildfire has also impacted much of the northern portion of the analysis area. These changes are considered a natural event and for scenic quality would therefore meet the Visual Quality Objectives of *Partial Retention, Modification and Maximum Modification*.	Proposed intermediate fuel break harvest, regeneration harvest, prescribed burning and transportation system modifications would be found throughout the project area. Both the hazard tree removal and regeneration harvest fuel breaks along roadways in the project area would be obvious in the foreground, but would not dominate the landscape character of the project area. Larger regeneration harvest units would also be visible along roadways that have moderate to low concern for scenery. These units have been designed to follow the topography of the landscape, would have stand structure retention in riparian areas, and would have a relatively feathered edge due to the mix of natural openings present in most of the area. Prescribed burning would leave some areas of vegetative mortality, but it would have the same appearance as that of natural fire found throughout the northern portion of the project area. The proposed action would retain stand structure, create openings that appear natural in the background viewshed, and replanting would introduce vegetative species that are healthier and more resilient to insect and disease issues. As proposed, the intermediate harvest fuel break, regeneration harvest, prescribed burning, and transportation system modifications would meet the Forest Plan Visual Quality Objectives of *Partial Retention*, *Modification* and *Maximum Modification*. For those units within Management Area 17, proposed harvest would meet the VQO of *Partial Retention*. While the project area would appear different than it currently does, the harvest would be designed to emulate natural processes in the background viewshed area and would not dominate the landscape character in areas where the VQO is *Partial Retention*. .

Compliance with LRMP and Other Relevant Laws, Regulations, Policies and Plans

All landscape-altering activities would meet adopted Forest Plan Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs). Duration of visual impacts should meet the guidelines outlined for each VQO in Agriculture Handbook No. 462-Chapter 2. The project would comply with Forest Plan forest-wide standards for visual resources in the Nez Perce National Forest Plan (USDA Forest Service 1987a). Full details of consistency of the project with the Forest Plan are located in the project record.

Management Area 17 is located to the American River – Selway Road 443 and the Falls Creek II Road 9716. Proposed fuel break harvest would meet the VQO of *Partial Retention* for the areas adjacent to the roadway and meet the FP direction for MA 17.

Intensity Factors for Significance (FONSI)

As the activities for the Green Horse project are implemented there would be a change in the appearance of the overall landscape that would have some effect on scenery. While the change would be apparent in most areas, there would still be a forest canopy that would appear as natural vegetative cover. The young trees that would replace the existing vegetation would appear different, but would create a healthier, more resilient landscape. Over the long term this activity would be beneficial to the overall scenic condition of the area even though there would be short term changes in the appearance of the landscape. Prescribed burning activities would also change the appearance of the area, but would appear similar to other areas affected by wildfire in the northern portion of the analysis area. The overall VQOs of the project area ranges from *Partial Retention* to *Maximum Modification*. Give the proposed activities, the Nez Perce National Forest Plan Visual Quality Objects would be met by this project.

/s/ Diana Jones

Landscape Architect

July 13, 2020

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